

Mayor's Column for June 1, 2011 Review

The past few weeks have been filled with community events, activities, and awards. They showcase the collaborative work of our local organizations, businesses, volunteers, and citizens, as well as our progress in drawing visitors to Evansville.

On May 14, the first event at Creekside Place was held, the annual Evansville Community Partnership Chili Cook-Off. ECP changed their calendar in order to hold the Cook-Off there. Around three hundred seventy people enjoyed our new community/senior center, most getting their first look at the beautiful facility. The Evansville Youth Center staffed children's activities in the craft room. I peeked in a few times. The room was filled with youngsters playing games and crafting with the older kids, and they were all enjoying themselves. Community building was happening in that room, the mission of ECP, and a goal of Creekside Place.

Evansville has successfully addressed an identified need for our future under extraordinary circumstances. To the many donors and volunteers responsible for this accomplishment: JOB WELL DONE!

I invite our citizens to be frequent users of Creekside Place; it will ensure the vibrancy and vitality of the facility for decades. The Evansville Common Council will hold its June 14 public hearing and Council meeting at Creekside Place, and will have a tour of the facility following the meeting.

City Administrator Dan Wietecha, Alders Floyd Hayes, Barb Jacobson, and Jim Brooks, and I attended a ceremony/reception for Evansville EMS personnel on May 18 in celebration of National Emergency Medical Services Week. We appreciate their commitment and dedication to enhancing public safety in Evansville.

Sixty members of the Wisconsin Wastewater Treatment Operators Association Southern Region held their spring day-long conference at the Evansville Golf Club on May 19. The parking lot was filled with municipal vehicles from across the area. I welcomed the attendees, spoke briefly about our treatment plant upgrade and our 25 x 25 plan for energy independence, and invited them to check out the many restoration projects that have transformed our historic downtown. I also encouraged the golfers in the group to return to Evansville for a round of golf. I actually felt sorry for them—a regional high school golf tournament was being held at the course, a tempting diversion to the technical presentations scheduled for the day. Evansville resident Troy Larson of Strand & Associates was one of the speakers, discussing the current status of phosphorus regulation in Wisconsin. In the afternoon City Engineer Dave Sauer of Cedar Corporation explained the features of our wastewater treatment facility and wind turbine, which was followed by a tour of our facility.

The Evansville Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade was recognized as a Top Project of 2010 by the “Wisconsin Daily Reporter,” a Wisconsin business newspaper dedicated to construction news. City Engineer Dave Sauer attended the May 25 award ceremony held in Waukesha.

The Madison Trust for Historic Preservation has selected the Evansville Grove Society’s Baker Office Building restoration project as one of their 2011 Historic Preservation Award winners. The awards will be presented July 31 at a ceremony at the Wisconsin Veteran’s Museum in Madison. The notification letter stated: “This project brought together passionate volunteers to rehabilitate a historic commercial building for a new use while maintaining its historic character. The project demonstrates that historic buildings can be adapted to contemporary needs, reduce the need for the resource consumption associated with new construction, and still stand as a cultural resource in a community.”

More than 165 individuals and 60 businesses and agencies contributed to the successful restoration of the Baker Office Building. It is a community honor to receive recognition for the significant collaborative efforts undertaken to complete the restoration. The Madison Trust for Historic Preservation previously honored another Evansville restoration, presenting an award for the Eager Economy Building project.

I participated in the recent Evansville High School Reality Check, an outstanding budgeting activity. Senior EHS students were each provided with a specific life scenario, including marital status, number of children, career, educational and/or credit card debt, and salary/wage. They made housing decisions, transportation choices, clothing and food purchases, daycare arrangements, etc. Students worked with their checkbooks, making deductions for insurance, taxes, car payments, gasoline, rent/mortgage, utilities, cable/internet fees, phone charges, credit card debt payments, veterinary services, entertainment, investments, and unforeseen expenses like traffic citations, appliance breakdowns, medical bills, and/or funeral services.

I manned the booth for part-time jobs. About halfway through the exercise, students began running out of funds with unpaid expenses still due. I suddenly became very busy dispensing part-time jobs. By the end of the activity, many students had a full-time job, multiple part-time jobs, and a “spouse” with several jobs in order to cover monthly expenses. Some were still running negative balances and wondering how they could make further adjustments. Examples of options that were discussed were comparing costs of home ownership vs. rental housing and reconsidering the number and type of vehicles owned.

The students soon realized how many services and expenses are typical in a monthly budget. Unexpected expenses played havoc with their planning. Most students were very surprised at the cost of daycare, particularly for multiple children in a family. I spoke with one student who ended with a sizable surplus—he did not have a family and he spent dollars on investments that were successful. The students were actively engaged in the budget exercise; I did not see disinterested, dismissive behavior.

The Reality Check required many volunteers and many businesses were participants, including staff from banks, insurance agencies, accounting firms, veterinary services, funeral services, real estate firms, exercise facilities, medical clinics, auto dealerships, and retail stores. Officer Reese, Officer Jones, Judge Alisankus, school board members, parents, and other community volunteers manned various “service” stations. EHS Alum Tyler Franklin manned the gasoline station, and he enjoyed frequently changing the cost of gasoline, \$4.09/gallon at one moment, \$3.79/gallon the next.

From my vantage point, the student/community interaction was extremely important and valuable. The community signaled our support and willingness to work with our youth, another opportunity for community building. It was a great hands-on exercise. I enjoyed participating and felt it was time well spent.

Following the Reality Check, I grabbed a quick sandwich and then joined Nancy Greve-Shannon’s industrious third graders and some EHS student volunteers and proceeded with the annual spring downtown clean up. Third graders are generally disgusted by litter, especially cigarette butts. The group also dug up weeds and dandelions. It is a good annual activity that invests our kids in caring about the appearance of our community and participating in community service.

The Rally ‘Round the Flag Civil War Weekend was a wonderful, enjoyable family-friendly event. It began with a program for more than 200 students at Theodore Robinson Intermediate School. Two members of the First Brigade Band displayed and played vintage band instruments. Two members of the event planning committee described the re-enactor encampment, and the flag-raising ceremony and Evansville history during the Civil War were explained to the students, with an invitation for them to participate in the activities.

Between 80 and 90 re-enactors provided a wonderful sense of a Civil War encampment in the Upper Park throughout the weekend. They came from Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

Friday night’s fireworks and firings from the Battery B cannon were great. More than a half-dozen members of a photography club from Sun Prairie photographed the fireworks and artillery. We haven’t yet seen their photos.

Saturday morning I enjoyed Lions Club pancakes and then strolled through the encampment. I spent time listening to the blacksmith explain his craft. I enjoyed the woman making lace—I recently took a beginning course in lace-making in Mineral Point and I collect lace bobbins.

There were lectures throughout Saturday. I was told there were more than 60 people in attendance at a program by well-known Civil War historian Lance Herdegen, Chair of the Wisconsin Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission. City Librarian Kathi Kemp reported that 48

people attended the afternoon style show, with explanations and descriptions of the clothing of the era by the Historical Timekeepers.

The Rally and Flag Raising Ceremony, in conjunction with the parade from the Park, was described by a local resident as “touching.” It aptly recreated the patriotic fervor of the time. I had not heard the First Brigade Band prior to the Rally. Their period rendition of the Star Spangled Banner was fabulous!

Along with Beloit neighbor Stephanie Klett, Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Tourism, Mother Nature participated in the Rally. We laughed as our pages of notes and words ran together and disintegrated in the rain. President Lincoln came prepared—his remarks were vinyl-covered and he had an umbrella!

Other afternoon activities included the beard growing contest, historic walking tours, tasty supper with the troops prepared by the Masons, and a presentation entitled “An Evening with the Lincolns.”

The Military Ball at Creekside Place was delightful and the clothing was beautiful. The attendees enjoyed the Grand March, the Virginia Reel (more than once), polkas, waltzes, and schottisches, as well as singing about “Goober Peas.” Lilly Reese enjoyed dancing with President Lincoln (as did I). The First Brigade Band is incomparable! What a memorable first dance at Creekside Place!

The Park on Sunday morning was lovely—blue sky, delightful breeze, gorgeous lake—and perfect for an outdoor church service. There were more visitors to the encampment on Sunday, with the improved weather and the great article on the front page of the Sunday Janesville Gazette.

The Living History commemoration at Maple Hill Cemetery was poignant and those in attendance experienced something very special. Re-enactors attending the Cemetery program commented on the well-scripted, unique event.

I have three observations about the Rally ‘Round the Flag weekend.

- First, I love the many activities in our community. I have always enjoyed the hometown 4th of July celebrations and our Library ice cream socials are iconic. The weekend activities in recognition of our country’s Civil War and the patriotism of Evansville citizens at that time, similar in communities across the United States, provided an added layer of patriotic reflection and an additional glimpse into Evansville’s past.

I have not seen a better use of the Upper Park than the re-enactor encampment. Park neighbors commented on the quaintness of the tents, lanterns, and music in the evenings. The photos of the encampment in our Park are stunning. One of the re-enactors told me it was the best setting for an encampment that they have seen.

I recall that in a community visioning session held as part of the smart growth planning process, there was consensus by the participants that “we value our history.” The weekend was about valuing and honoring our history.

- Second, there was a concerted effort to ramp up event marketing. The weekend was listed on the Wisconsin Department of Tourism website and the Discover Wisconsin website, as well as the Chamber, City, and ECP websites. It was included in the calendar of events on the Discover Wisconsin television show the Saturday prior to the weekend and the NBC 15 Morning Show Calendar of Activities on the Saturday and Sunday of our weekend event. A Discover Wisconsin radio spot was dedicated to our Civil War recognition, running on stations around Wisconsin a few days before our activities. There were radio interviews with WCLO and WEKZ. There were two articles in the Wisconsin State Journal in the week prior to our event, several articles in the Janesville Gazette, including the Sunday front page article about the encampment, and multiple background stories were printed in the Review over the last several months. Posters were distributed and flyers were sent home with hundreds of Evansville and Janesville students. Articles were included in the several re-enactment newsletters and organizational meetings were attended to promote our many activities. A reporter from the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel spent a good portion of Saturday in Evansville and attended the Rally. A great article about our commemoration appeared in the Monday, May 23, edition.

Our many marketing efforts will be fine-tuned and streamlined for future community activities. We are improving our capacity to market Evansville.

- Finally, this event took more than a year of planning and involved hundreds of community volunteers. The planning committee will write a wrap-up article thanking the many contributors and volunteers. I would like to address the community-wide support that was provided and necessary to accomplish a new, multi-day event involving dozens of out-of-town participants. Ray Anderson, our parks manager, and the Public Works department readied the Park and the Cemetery for the weekend. The Water & Light Department assisted businesses that needed help in decorating upper parts of storefronts. The Police Department, EMS, and Fire District provided the extra public safety required. The Library hosted various activities and City Hall staff assisted with the paperwork necessary for the weekend. Kyle Allen organized the first fireworks of the season and Shannon Law Office and Roger Roth CPA & Associates were generous sponsors of the fireworks. Nearly every community organization was involved in one way or another, from marketing to participation, including the Grove Society, ECP, Masons, Lions Club, American Legion, Evansville Youth Center, Evansville Community Theater, and Evansville School District. Businesses participated in decorating their storefronts, and Allen Creek Gallery and Windmill Antiques sold event tickets. This is by no means a

complete list of contributors. Dozens of citizens also volunteered for many jobs, such as gathering wood for the campfires, and working at the visitors' center.

Our community vitality is related to the commitment of our dedicated volunteers. We are so fortunate that our citizens give generously of their time, talent, and their dollars.

I just returned from the Memorial Day ceremony at Maple Hill Cemetery to finish this article. The VFW Rally in the Alley is underway and the Chamber Raffle will be held later this afternoon. The community has again gathered and is strengthening our interrelationships. As we reflect on the military service and sacrifices of our families, friends, and neighbors, appreciate our freedoms and our right to work on improving our lives and our community.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Yard waste pick-up is scheduled for the first full week of the month, June 6-10.

Big Red's Backyard Bash, a Wounded Warrior Fundraiser Event, will be held on Saturday, June 4, at Geneo's.

A public hearing on the Evansville Smart Growth Comprehensive Plan Amendment will occur at the Evansville Common Council meeting on June 14. The meeting will be held at Creekside Place, 102 Maple Street, at 6:30 p.m.

COMMUNITY THANKS

I thank Evansville for the community-wide volunteer ethic that allows all of us to enjoy the many local activities that makes our community special.